

Churchill, Mystery Man of English Politics

By W. P. CROZIER

Manchester, England, February—(By Mail). SOME of the principal English and Scottish newspapers have just been holding a "model election" to test the system of proportional representation—P. R. as we call it here for short. There were fifteen candidates of all political sorts and sizes—party leaders like Asquith, Lloyd George and Bonar Law, independents of the type of Lord Robert Cecil. Labor men as far apart as Clynes, Smillie and Henderson, the popular "watchdog," Horatio Bottomley, and women like Lady Astor, the Unionist, and Margaret Bondfield, Labor.

There was also Mr. Winston Churchill. The voting was by post and over 35,000 voting papers were sent in. When the papers were examined and every candidate had credited to him the number of papers on which he received the voter's "first preference," it was found that Mr. Churchill had precisely 151. There was only one other candidate—who is in no sense a leading political figure—with so ludicrously small a poll. Now Mr. Churchill was minister of war and minister for the air when this vote took place and is now not only taking up the office of Secretary of State for the Colonies but is assuming responsibility for a vast new province which is to be brought under the colonial office—the Middle East, comprising Egypt and the mandatory territories of Mesopotamia and Palestine. How comes it, then, that a personality of this importance should receive a mere beggarly handful of votes from a very varied and intelligent newspaper electorate? Was there a mistake or do the figures really represent public opinion?

They do. Probably there is no political personality at the present day who is so generally unpopular and distrusted by so many separate sections of opinion. Mr. Churchill, an aristocrat, began by being a Conservative. He made his reputation by attacking his party from its own benches in the House of Commons. In this way he contributed to the downfall of Mr. Balfour's (Conservative) Government in 1905 and established his claim on the gratitude of the Liberal party. When the war came he was associated as first lord of the admiralty with that masterful man, Lord Fisher, and over the attack on the Dardanelles the two masterful men fell out and both of them resigned, so that the country was deprived of the services of the greatest seamen whom it has produced since Nelson's time.

Mr. Churchill was mainly responsible for the idea of the Antwerp and the Gallipoli expeditions, both of which failed disastrously. There are many nowadays who regard these schemes as brilliant strategic conceptions which, with better fortune, might have changed the face of the war, but there are many more people in England who regard them as wild projects forced by an imaginative civilian on long-suffering soldiers and who maintain that the diversion of forces to Gallipoli weakened the Western front and so prolonged the war. This section has never forgiven Mr. Churchill, and never will. He represents to them one of the most costly and disastrous failures in British history.

Then it is remembered against him that when Mr. Asquith found it impossible to admit him to the inner cabinet at one period of the war, he resigned and declared his intention of serving his country at the front. His reluctance to serve in a subordinate position brought a black mark against him in the country's books and another was added when it was found that after a comparatively short period of service at the front he was back again in politics. Let it be one thing or the other, people said, but to make these rapid changes argued a marked instability and capriciousness of character. Others again he has offended on the personal side by his habit of writing signed articles for the popular press on political questions. This is done more often in England nowadays than it used to be, but it is still done very rarely and there is a strong feeling against one of the most prominent ministers of the Crown writing (say) in an illustrated Sunday newspaper. The feeling may possibly be old-fashioned and no better than a prejudice, but it exists. It is characteristic that people cast about for some special explanation of so strange a phenomenon and found it in the knowledge that Mr. Churchill is by no means a wealthy man and would presumably be glad to receive the handsome fees which an affluent Sunday paper could afford to pay.

The critics who are offended with Mr. Churchill because of his resigning office, hurrying to the front and then returning to politics are, like those who resent his newspaper activities, drawn from all classes. Those who perpetually throw up against him the Antwerp and Gallipoli expeditions are mostly members of the Unionist party—especially the high-and-dry Tory element represented by the *Morning Post*—because Mr. Churchill was a Liberal minister and disliked not only for that reason but because he was a deserter from the Tory ranks. But since the armistice Mr. Churchill has succeeded very thoroughly in alienating both Liberals and Labor men. The hostility of Labor might be assumed, for the Labor party preserves its independence and is hostile to all ministers, Liberal or Unionist,

But not to all of them equally and to none of them as much as to Mr. Churchill. The alienation of Liberals is much more serious, because at one time Mr. Churchill had a considerable hold on them as a sincere and eloquent defender of Free Trade. That hold he lost when it came to be believed that he was the chief driving force behind armed intervention in Russia and that he more than any other man was responsible for saddling this country with persistent participation in the war of the Russian Whites against the Bolsheviks.

Before we withdrew our active support of the Kolchaks and Denikins and other hopeless last-hopes of the Russian émigrés we had spent one hundred million pounds sterling. We had maintained for many months the miserable Archangel expedition, which was eventually abandoned because the country would simply not go on with it and the government was forced to yield. It has never been any secret that during all the

shevism, he sprang to the conclusion that the remedy was to suppress Bolshevism in Russia, the seat of infection, by armed force and to maintain in its place (presumably by armed forces, if necessary) some other form of government which would not only refuse to ally itself with German Bolshevism but would be actively hostile to it and help to keep it down. Now it would be foolish to deny that there was and still is something to be said for this fear that Germany might "go Bolshevik." But, even so, a foreign war against Russian Bolshevism is the last way to suppress it. All history has shown that foreign invasion rallies all parties in the country attacked to the side of the régime threatened. So it was in the time of the French Revolution and so it has been in Russia now. Mr. Churchill's reply would be that we did not make war on Russia with enough vigor and persistence, and the answer to that is the simple and conclusive one, as far as England is concerned, that if we had not stopped the Russian war there would have been revolt and revolution in this country.

Mr. Churchill also failed to see that if Germany were to become a Bolshevik state, it would be because she had become wretched, starving and bankrupt. Bolshevism only succeeds where it finds the appropriate soil to root in, and that it finds in want and destitution. There is in Germany a very strong determination to resist Bolshevism and to prevent the country being dragged down into the abyss. What we say to Mr. Churchill therefore is that Russia should be left, as Mr. Wilson has urged, to work out her salvation free from foreign interference and that we should help Germany as far as is reasonably possible, to help herself; we should strengthen the anti-Bolshevik elements, the masses of millions of decent citizens who hate the idea of the Moscow terrorism and will not "go Bolshevik" themselves, except in passion and despair. Of course, there are some people who disagree with this argument, and approve of Mr. Churchill's views. But these are the very people who censure him most severely for his "wildcat schemes" during the war and distrust him because he is—or was—a Liberal.

So Mr. Churchill has come to lose the confidence of almost every section of public opinion here. The mystery is that he turns up none the less in every ministry that is formed and receives the most important offices under the Crown. Since 1906 he has been almost continuously in office. He has been under secretary for the Colonies, secretary for home affairs, minister of munitions, first lord of the admiralty, minister for war, minister for the air and is now minister for the Colonies, the Dominions and the Middle East in succession to Lord Milner. Liberals denounce him as a spendthrift and a militarist; Tories demand that their leaders should keep him out of the government as they kept out Lord Haldane. But all to no use. Mr. Churchill has many enemies and few followers, but he continues all the time to be one of our governors.

One reason is that Mr. Lloyd George finds in him a kindred spirit. Mr. Churchill is bold and adventurous and knows his own mind. During the war he was, like Mr. George, an "Easterner," hoping to avoid the interminable bloodshed in the West by finding some "way round" in the East. Mr. George prides himself on being a man who gets things done, who has decision and a driving will. So has Mr. Churchill and in respect of these qualities the two men shine brilliantly among the mediocrities who surround them in the ministry. Again, Mr. Churchill, like Mr. George, is accessible to new ideas. Everyone admitted that he was the right man to be at the head of the air ministry, where the alert and receptive mind was needed for the development of the new weapon. It was he who, when the war office stupidly and stubbornly frowned on the idea of the tank, took it up and pressed it forward, so that the British Army owes to him the saving of unnumbered lives.

A good judge has said that Mr. Churchill is the one man that our premier really fears as a possible rival and that this is the reason why he keeps him carefully in the ministry, despite his unpopularity, just as Italy became a member of the Triple Alliance because that was the only way of preventing her fighting with Austria. It may be so, for certainly Mr. Churchill would be a much more formidable enemy than any whom Mr. George has at present to face.

No one can forecast Mr. Churchill's future. He recently came into a fortune of £5,000 a year, which should make him independent of office if he should choose to quarrel with the premier. This makes him more formidable as an opponent than he ever was before. He has no strong root either in the country or in the Parliament and Mr. George has both. He inherited from his father the traditions of Tory democracy and the sacred cause of economy, but there are no signs that he cares for either of them much today. He has too much native ability, too high a quality of mind and will to be kept down and it is probable that his presence in the ministry is worth the price that Mr. George has to pay for it.



WINSTON CHURCHILL and MRS. CHURCHILL

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last two years in which Mr. George has been struggling with painful and vacillating steps toward a peaceful settlement with Bolshevik Russia, Mr. Churchill has been opposed to him. He has made no secret himself of his bitter regret that England did not do more to assist the White Russian leaders. He has, of course, pleaded that whatever he did as war minister was done by him in execution of the policy decided on by the whole cabinet, and this was possibly true. But the country recognizes in him the strongest opponent of Mr. George's policy and the strongest advocate of a war of which it had become utterly weary.

England has come gradually to take the view which President Wilson recently expressed when he said that the Bolshevik domination was a monstrous tyranny over Russia but that it was not to be overthrown by foreign intervention, which could indeed but strengthen it. Mr. Churchill, like France, took a very different view. His view was not, however, based on a mere violent antipathy to Bolshevism as a revolutionary doctrine against which we must go crusading. He has always been afraid—and is probably still afraid—lest Bolshevik Russia should join hands with Germany. Against such a Bolshevik block, as he sees it, no state in Central and Eastern Europe could stand up. Hungary, Austria, the border states and Italy would all fall into the Bolshevik melting pot and Bolshevism would march triumphantly up to the River Rhine, thence to face and to menace France, England and in the last resort even the United States.

Mr. Churchill has vision, he has large ideas, he looks ahead, and few ministers do as much as that. It is easy to see how as soon as he became obsessed with this nightmare of a joint Russo-German Bol-